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NBC BRIEFING

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BACKGROUND: YUGOSLAV REFUGEE PROBLEM

- I. The number of Yugoslav refugees escaping to Austria and Italy has increased sharply in recent months.
 - A. According to Austrian figures 1,585 escaped to Austria in June, 2,600 in July, and almost 4,000 in August. Austrian Interior Minister estimates total influx this year may reach 20,000. (Previously had been running about 5,000 a year.)
 - B. In the first seven months of 1957, over 6,000 Yugoslavs fled to Italy compared with about 1,300 in all of 1955 and 5,800 in 1956.
- II. Increase apparently results from gradual relaxation of Yugoslav border controls.
 - A. Regime probably wants to alleviate its unemployment problem as well as rid itself of malcontents.
 - B. On 14 June an Austrian official estimated that only about 10% of Yugoslav refugees were politically motivated. Substantial majority cite economic conditions and personal factors, as reasons for leaving Yugoslavia.
 - C. Austria is required under international law to give asylum to refugees from political persecution, but need not accept those entering for economic reasons.
- III. None of principals has yet made formal proposals for a solution of problem.
 - A. Austria has requested financial assistance from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and threatened to turn back refugees who cannot prove political persecution. Both Italy and Austria

B. Yugoslavs until last month virtually ignored the increasing number of "illegal escapees." In a 28 August editorial, however, the Yugoslav newspaper Borba hinted that Belgrade might be willing to permit legal emigration to help solve the problem. Admitting the existence of unemployment, the Borba editorial suggested that partial solution would be to arrange Yugoslav emigration on the basis of intergovernmental agreements.